

DEDICATORY ADDRESS

of

REAR ADMIRAL C. A. SWANSON (MC) USN

SURGEON GENERAL OF THE NAVY

AT THE COMMISSIONING

OF THE

U. S. NAVAL HOSPITAL, BEAUFORT, SOUTH CAROLINA

29 April 1949

Distinguished Guests, Members and Friends of the Navy  
and Marine Corps:

Since I laid the cornerstone for this hospital on July 18, 1947 it has not been my privilege to return and note the progress of its construction. I am certain, however, that as we view the completed edifice today on this beautiful site we all know and can take pride and pleasure in the fact that it will take its place with the finest of our temples of healing. I am fully aware that such accomplishments do not take place without much help from many people and to you citizens of the great States of South Carolina and Georgia who have manifested so keen an interest in this hospital and who have been of so much cooperation and assistance in its inception and construction, I wish to express to you the sincere appreciation of the Navy, and especially of its Medical Department.

Although this is a hospital for the use of military personnel it cannot be charged that it is an agency of warfare. This has never been and can never be true of any institution devoted to the alleviation of the suffering of mankind. Our hospitals are not the products of selfishness, greed, or unbridled ambition. They are not the outgrowth of conquest and neither

are they the monuments erected from the spoils of war. On the other hand they represent the finest and most compassionate motives of the human mind and are living memorials to the highest virtues of any people. It is interesting to realize that they are not the exclusive claim of ours or any other religion. Instead they seem to spring directly and spontaneously from that divine spark of compassion which God has implanted in the soul of every man.

From earliest antiquity the ills of mankind have presented probably the greatest problems of life to individuals and to nations. The cure of these ills has intrigued and perplexed the lives and minds of the greatest leaders of all times. The growth and use of medical knowledge, although hastened by the contributions of many great men of science, has come to its present state of development by a long and hard growth through trial and experience. As the superstition of men gradually began to die away, the development of medical science became more rapid and today we can look with thankfulness to our ability to effect relief and cures in most of our physical ills. At the same time it is with a sense of deep humility that we recognize the many diseases and especially mental ills

for which we have found no cure. Medicine alone cannot cure all our ailments. A higher power than that of man is vital in the treatment of all diseases and is the only physician to which we can turn for assistance in many mental disorders.

The earliest medical science was founded in the experience of mankind. As early as the 14th Century before Christ, we find the Egyptian people systematically writing upon medical subjects, and it was not long before the Egyptian Government had a group of doctors paid by the State who were required to treat the sick throughout that nation. It is therefore apparent that many hundreds of years before the coming of Christ these people had a semblance of organization of trained medical people and hospitals for the treatment of the sick.

Along about the third Century before Christ, hospitals were established in India by royal decree throughout the land along the routes of travel. These hospitals were to be well provided with instruments and medicines and skillful physicians were to be appointed to administer them at the expense of the State. In Mexico just to the south of us, that historic people also erected hospitals which were supported by the government for



the care of the sick and the permanent refuge of disabled soldiers.

This little bit of ancient history is especially interesting as showing the inherent compassion of mankind for those who are sick and suffering and also as expressing this compassion into effective action through the organized forces of their government. Insofar as the care of the soldiers and sailors of the wars for the many hundreds of years, the great Roman conquerors of the world early recognized the fact that any effective military force must receive the best medical attention available and in the second Century after the birth of Christ the Roman Army had an organized Medical Corps, although for many years physicians and surgeons had accompanied the armed forces of probably all nations. History tells us that the great emperor Hadrian founded a government hospital for those wounded in war sometime around the year 130 A.D. One hundred and fifty years later the Roman emperor Aurelian issued an order stating, "Let the soldiers be cured gratuitously by the physicians and let them conduct themselves quietly in the hospital, and he who would raise strife, let him be lashed."

In 1666 when the French Navy was organized, a naval hospital for French sailors was founded at Rochefort. Since the founding of that French Naval Hospital, other hospitals for the refuge and treatment of the disabled warriors of the sea have sprung up along the coasts of all civilized nations. Although born of sheer necessity, they wait for the coming of war which they all fearfully hope will never start again. As quiet as the smile of peace, their polished wards for the most part silent and unused, they stand amid the trees and flowers a ready refuge for the heroic lovers and protectors of country and of home, erected on the sure foundation that their walls will never crumble until the day of everlasting peace.

In our own Navy, provision has been made for the treatment of the sick and disabled seaman from the earliest beginning of this nation. As soon as we began to have ships of our own, physicians and surgeons were placed aboard them for the care of the sick and wounded. In 1799 a law was passed by the Congress authorizing the Secretary of the Navy to deduct from the pay of every officer, sailor, and marine, the sum of 20 cents per month to establish a fund for the care of naval

personnel in civilian hospitals. It was not long before this system began to show its defects in that naval personnel passed from the control of the Navy, lingered in hospitals for considerable periods of time, and in many instances, never even returned to their posts of duty in the Navy. Accordingly, the Congress in 1811 recognized that in order to have and maintain an efficient Navy it was impossible to hospitalize the sailors satisfactorily in civilian hospitals and consequently it enacted a law for the establishment of hospitals owned and operated by the Navy. At this point it is interesting to note that the Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government headed by former President Herbert Hoover has recently recommended that all Naval Hospitals within the United States, except one, be taken out from under the control and operation by the Navy, and that Naval Personnel be hospitalized in civilian or other hospitals of the Federal Government.

Be that as it may, naval hospitals were established in Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Norfolk during the early

years following the enactment of the Naval Hospital law in 1811. Today the Navy has 25 hospitals within the continental United States and 4 outside the United States, with a total bed capacity of approximately 20,000, which in time of war could be expanded to a much larger figure. Of course, these hospitals are not filled to overflowing with patients, just as this hospital we are dedicating today will not, in time of peace, be filled to capacity. But in this connection we must carefully keep in mind the fact that there must be a surplus of facilities and personnel in peacetime so that in the event of emergency we will have an efficient and organized nucleus with which to take care of the first casualties of war and which can be rapidly expanded to meet any eventuality which the defense of this country may require. We hear much talk today about the expense of maintaining the Armed Services of our country and it is true that the cost is tremendous, but until such time as the day of permanent peace arrives we must be in a position to protect our homes, our families, and our nation. When as a people we reach the stage where we are not willing or cannot



defend our country, then all the struggles and efforts of our forefathers and ourselves to make a better world within which the freedom of mankind may flourish, will most certainly have been in vain.

Not so many years after this nation decided that a Navy was essential to its growth and development, it was recognized that the Harbor at Port Royal was one of the finest this country possessed and with that realization some naval facilities were placed in this area and during the war between the States the first hospital was established at Port Royal. After that war, the hospital which had been in operation for about three years was decommissioned, and from that time up until 1898 we had nothing here which might have been dignified with the name of a hospital. However, between the years 1868 and 1898 we did maintain some medical activity at Parris Island and in 1893 the Navy had on duty an apothecary by the name of Gowan Hazel. Hazel was a native of Beaufort County and during his service at Parris Island he had a small one-room building where he lived and dispensed drugs for the Navy. On Sunday, August 27, 1893 a tidal wave swept the island and Hazel was drowned in

an attempt to rescue the grandchild of a Negro minister by the name of Reverend W. Green.

About the time of the war with Spain, Dr. Allan Stuart, who was a local Beaufort County doctor, was placed on duty as a medical officer at Parris Island and it is believed that Dr. Stuart established the first hospital and became its first Commanding Officer. In December, 1899, Dr. Middleton S. Elliott, also a son of Beaufort County, was on duty as a medical officer at Parris Island. It is interesting to note Dr. Elliott's distinguished career as a medical officer in the Navy and that he became the second of the three vice admirals which the Medical Department of the Navy has had during its history. Our records further show that Dr. John C. Boyd, a distinguished son of South Carolina, was the Assistant to the Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery at the time the hospital was reestablished at Parris Island in 1898. After his retirement from the Navy Dr. Boyd became very prominent both in medical and financial circles in the city of Washington and died in London in 1927 while on a trip as representative of the American Security and Trust Company. I find that on July 7, 1927 an entry appears in the Journal of the Medical Department of the Navy noting

the death of Dr. Boyd and concluding with the statement "A good officer and a good man." With the coming of World War I the hospital at Parris Island which exists today, was constructed, and since that time has served the Navy well during both peace and war.

This beautiful new structure takes its place with our naval hospitals at a time when the Medical Department of the Navy has far greater responsibilities than ever in its history. I am sure that you will be interested in knowing that your Navy and its Medical Department is playing a specific role in world peace as an outgrowth of the Charter of the United Nations. This Charter provided for the establishment of certain trust territories throughout the world, one of which has been established in the Pacific Ocean covering a number of islands which were formerly under mandate to the government of Japan and the control of which we assumed as a sacred trust by virtue of a trusteeship agreement entered into between this country and the United Nations in July 1947. Under this agreement the Navy has been charged with the responsibility for the time being of governing this trust territory and carrying out the responsibilities of

the United States to the people living within it. We have specifically agreed in our trust agreement to "Protect the health of the inhabitants" of the trust territory. To that end we have established on the Island of Guam a Medical Center where we are operating schools for the training of native doctors, dentists, and nurses. We have also established a leprosarium on the Island of Tinian and a large dispensary on the Island of Saipan for tubercular patients. In addition, our medical and dental officers are endeavoring to carry out our responsibility to the United Nations of the world to see that the health of these native populations is protected to the fullest extent possible commensurate with personnel and facilities. You can clearly see therefore that the Medical Department of the Navy has been charged with a responsibility in connection with the peace of the world in these trust territories and the protection and advancement of their inhabitants. I can assure you that we shall discharge this responsibility in keeping with the trust which we have been given and with the principles of freedom and love of mankind for which this nation stands.

The history of the last war is not yet complete and may not



soon be complete. But more important than its history is our effort to alleviate the suffering from that conflict and to this purpose it is with a grateful heart for our victory that I dedicate this hospital as an institution of mercy for the care and comfort of those who have and who will offer themselves for the defense of our country and our people.